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ABSTRACT

A university teacher of English as a Second Language describes the use of CNN Newsroom materials to teach listening skills. The basic news broadcast materials, including video and audio tapes, are provided by CNN, and have been developed by the teacher into instructional units. A classroom guide is available on the Internet. The instruction is designed for middle- to high-advanced students of English. Further development of the course is expected to lead to several types of classes, one using a standard video/audiocassette procedure, one using school-produced taped questions and answers, and one involving note-taking and question-and answer followup discussion. A step-by-step classroom procedure currently used with the video and audio tapes is described. The rationale and pedagogical basis for conducting this class, based on a review of literature, are also explained. Three principles in developing tests based on the materials are outlined: test questions should constitute a communicative interchange between test writer and test-taker; test questions should be easy to process; and it is the test writer's responsibility to define, identify, and subsequently remove any potential difficulties in the test. Some considerations in developing materials are offered. (Contains 20 references.) (MSE)

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Using CNN Newsroom in Advanced Listening Classes

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USING CNN NEWSROOM IN ADVANCED LISTENING CLASSES

Samuel Vann

General Description of CNN Newsroom Multi-skills Listening Class

CNN Newsroom has enabled me to introduce science, business, technology, ecology, and our world into both my daily classes and a special multi-skills listening workshop. Class size has averaged approximately 30 or more for all classes during the last three semesters or approximately 30% to 35% of enrolled student in the I.E.P. This is a very large group considering that the class is an optional Wednesday activity, and attendance is voluntary. Those who cannot attend on Wednesday due to a extramural conflict receive the units and work independently in the Noyes Language Learning Center.

CNN Newsroom is an innovation to the I.E.P. and represents an enormous investment of my time. I have 27 units in progress. At the suggestion of Dr. Beukenkamp, I have already introduced it to The English for Academic Purposes Program (EAP) and Judy Pierpont of the Writing Program, and I will soon be introducing it to Visiting Scholars Program, and the International T.A. Training Program (ITATP). I receive a classroom guide over the internet daily. I often share this guide with my students as a survey for future lessons.

The sample lessons used in the dossier are from an eight week, 50 minute *CNN Newsroom* multi-skills listening class (the emphasis is on listening) which the middle-advanced to high-advanced students attend. Attendance is restricted to these levels. Lower-level students may attend, but they often find the lessons too difficult. Several of the later units are first drafts and will be converted to audio-cassette units which feature multiple choice questions.

Homework for CNN Newsroom

Homework for the CNN Newsroom listening class often comes in the form of a take-home cassette with the sound-track from a unit on it (See *1.8 Books, Hay-on-Wye*). The students then watch the video in class the next week and review their answers with me.

To offset the initial difficulty that some students may have in the class, the video segments are available in permanent holdings (*English Video 9.1* through 9.6) in The Noyes Language Learning Center for them to review at a more leisurely pace. I usually include only one and a half hours of segments on each video tape. This format allows me to review them (on audio-cassette) on the way to work, place them in our new Language Learning Center, or most importantly, place them in the hands of the students who often have the most difficulty understanding some of the CNN reports (usually in low/middle-high intermediate sections of the program).

A goal of this class was to get many of my students past their initial "news anxiety" when they first arrived in the U.S. and perhaps motivate them to make it part of their daily routine to watch regular CNN programming in the Statler Hotel Student Cafe while they eat lunch. Cornell's other programs, the EAP Program, Writing Program, Visiting Scholars Program, and ITATP Program also have access to the video segments.

Within a month, if permission is granted from CNN on satellite access, our Noyes Language Learning Center will be taping CNN Newsroom for me and airing it daily

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after classes let out.

Using CNN Newsroom with Regular Class Materials

The short segments are all very "assignable" and are going to work well with the four *CNN 93 Timer Capsule* and *94 Time Capsules* that have just been purchased by our Language Learning Center for me to use with my classes. I have edited 120 video segments (with transcripts) that are listed on the 1994 video segments guide and done research on Lexis/Nexus to find the transcripts. I say research, because to find the segment transcripts necessitated viewing them and taking considerable notes in order to find the correct transcript version. In all video units, I located and printed the transcripts on Lexis/Nexus, scanned them with the Apple scanner in Noyes, saved and converted them to a Write Now 4.0 document, and placed them in my computer files organized into separate files, and them made them available to my colleagues.

Future Use of *CNN Newsroom*

If all goes well, starting in the fall semester of 1995, the *CNN Newsroom* listening class will be 12 weeks long with three alternating styles of classes.

The first class will be the standard audio-cassette/video procedure outlined above.

The second class will use questionaires with timed (10 seconds per question), multiple choice questions on audio-tape, utilizing the voices of our staff. Students will receive the answer sheet only (i.e., *Opinion series*); transcripts and questions included on the audio will be withheld.

The third style class will utilize *CNN 93 & 94 Time Capsule* will involve note-taking with an informal question and answer follow up.

For 1995 video segments, separate video tapes will be created for the separate desks: *Top Story, Editor's Desk, Business Desk*, and so forth. Teachers will receive regular monthly updates of segments to be copied(See *CNN Newsroom 1995 Video Segments to be Saved*). These "desks" will again be placed in the permanent video library at Noyes Language Learning Center. I will then be creating CD-ROM disks of the tapes with the assistance of the staff at Noyes on the CD-ROMs as a pilot project.

If you watch several segments of the sample video dub I have provided, you will see that the video segments provide a more academic style of language and a wealth of idioms, colorful expressions, and international dialects. The segments are superbly styled with contemporary music and visuals.

Simplified Classroom Procedures

Usually, students are given only a short time to read the unit questions before the audio or video tape is played. As a rule there are no pre-reading, pre-discussion activities on either the vocabulary or the ideas of the video segment. Similar to many tests, they either are familiar with the subject or they are not. They are suddenly initiated into a topic (life here in the U.S.) or elsewhere (i.e, International Desk, Where in the World?) they may know very little about. This is what makes it appealing and demanding for them. The challenge is not between students, but

between each of them and their question/answer sheets. Answers are reviewed in a rapid-fire manner.

Starting a Lesson

As you can see from some lessons (my second drafts) of the *CNN Newsroom* class, students generally listen to an audio-cassette first. Each unit has a separate audio-cassette marked 1.1, etc.

To begin, playing the audio-cassette first allows them to concentrate on the questions at hand instead of the distraction of trying to watch the video, listen, and write answers simultaneously. Of course, the audio-tape is de-contextualized without the pictures, charts, or on-screen summary outlines (such as in *CNN 1.1 Islam, Feb. 22*, i.e., The Shahada, Salat, Zakat, Fast, Hajj.) After the first listening or viewing, they compare and discuss their answers briefly in pairs .

The second step is watching the video (their second try for questions they may have missed), often with pencils down, no note-taking allowed, and eyes on the video. While they are watching the video, they must recall the information later and be completely attentive to who the speakers are, their viewpoints, and other visual *context* and spoken *content*.

After that, the plain *Transcript A* is then given to them to read for answers or points they still may have missed or if they want to confirm correct answers. The time they are allowed to *skim* or *scan* for answers is still limited to a matter of minutes. The transcripts are absolutely essential to their feelings of success. What they didn't hear or see, they may now read.
If they still fail to find an anwer, *Transcript B* is to follow.

Transcript B is withheld until we are ready to review the answers as a group after viewing the video. To make follow-up and review easier in a larger class of 30-40, in *Transcript B*, the transcript line has been numbered, the answer has been underlined, and a superscript number in italic bold has been keyed to the same number of the question on the answer sheet.

You will notice a smorgasbord of question types on some answer sheets while others are more uniform, linear, or hierarchal. Usually the questions progress from general to more specific information. Some answers require a knowledge of synonyms (See *CNN 1.7, Swarming Robots*) and have the symbol (closer look) by the question that students first try to answer with the Transcript A. The *Vocab Key* is often withheld until the last moment. It is also especially effective to give out the *Vocab Key* a week before a more difficult science or business unit is shown (See *2.27 'GOES Next' Weather Satellites.*)

Usually, two units can be covered in a 55 minute period. The pace may be brisk, but the operation is not reckless. This is a non-stop class operating under the simulated laws of time pressure, similar to a TOEFL test, for instance. Although students do not explicitly "learn how to be" more attentive, concise, and accurate through specific strategies taught in the course, they perhaps "learn how to be" by doing. They cover a substantial amount of vocabulary, but definitions are limited to the tasks and contexts at hand.

Rationales and Review of Literature for the CNN Multi-skills Class

Why the Class was Created

As a rationale for my creation of the CNN class, Murphy states that: "Lecture-centered teaching in mainstream classrooms requires that ESL students function effectively as listeners from the very beginning of their academic careers (55). Dunkel and Davy (ESP 33) also note that the lecture as a method of instruction is pervasive at institutions of higher learning in the United States. Whether I agree with the effectiveness of lectures as a learning tool is beside the point, my students must be prepared for both listening to them in an oral form (my use of the video as a source of spoken English) and written form (my tests or answer sheets that reflect note-taking skills).

My foreign students constantly tell me that they received very little preparation for listening to university-style lectures. To further this obvious notion, Murphy states that within most classroom settings, listening serves as a primary channel for learning and that listening and the connections between listening, speaking, and pronunciation emerge as central components of ESL oral communications (55).

When students watch a video segment, either short or long, the video completes what Murphy explains as "reciprocally interdependent oral language processes" (51). While students watch the videos and listen for answers they must deal directly with various pronunciations and dialects, speakers of different ages, ethnicities, rates of speech, and so forth. They must also determine the topic, tone, situation, purpose, emotional state of the speakers involved by watching and listening to the video, what Lund calls *orientation*, which involves "determining essential facts about the text, including the roles of the participants, the general topic and genre of the discouse" (e.g., that one is hearing a CNN newsbroadcast about weather satellites) (qtd. in Dunkel, Tesol Quarterly 447).

Dunkel (Tesol Quarterly 447) quotes Lund's 1990 taxonomy "of real-world listening behaviours" and their possible application in listening to a lecture as (a) *main idea comprehension* (e.g., "understanding a lecture well enough to summarize the main points or complete a basic outline): (b) *detail comprehension* (e.g., understanding particular details such as cause and effect); and (e) *full comprehension*, which involves understanding the main idea plus the details (e.g.,"understanding a lecture so that one can take detailed notes or make a detailed outline"). I would like to see the CNN Newsroom class be possibly redesigned to spend more time on the element of *full comprehension*; yet, students prefer to work on two separate units and prefer a faster pace.

The Pedagogical Basis for the Class

The CNN Multi-skills class is by all means a task-based class. When the task syllabus is combined with focus on form or meaning in task-based language teaching, the task receives more support in second language acquisition (SLA) research as a viable unit around which to organize language teaching and learning opportunities (Long and Crookes, 27). When I tell my students that listening skills and language learning takes time, I am restating what Diane Larsen-Freeman says in

her article: The process is gradual. Learners do not master forms with their first encounter (336). Likewise, she adds that in pedagogical situations, it makes sense to recycle the presentations of forms (e.g., grammar structures) so that learners will have ample opportunity to work out form-function correspondences (336). Many of the CNN units and my regular classes take into account this rather obvious truth about acquisition being a gradual process involving the mapping of form, meaning, and use that Larsen-Freeman states.

David Nunan's five criteria for communicative tasks and its application in the language curriculum apply very well to the overall design of a large class like the CNN class. Nunan offers the following model. I have underlined his ideas and followed them with my comments (279).

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language. This occurs when students discuss vocabulary meaning, ask me or others questions about their answers or errors, or discuss the content or macro- or micro listening sections of the CNN video segment.
2. The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation. The CNN transcripts combined with actual interviews and the speaker's imperfections provide a wealth of accents, colorful expression and idioms.
3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language, but also on the learning process itself. The process of the CNN class is a very self-directed, self-correcting one. Larsen-Freeman offers commen sense knowledge that experience has taught me and research has confirmed (337): in a large class, like the CNN Newsroom class, there is tremendous individual variation among learners (mid-advanced to beyond ESL Focus), and teachers need to take into account these differences and learn to work with them. Individual differences were the primary reason I decided to use transcripts that were keyed to the answers. Larsen-Freeman also adds that learner rely on the knowledge and experience they have and are active participants in the learning process (337). To be active participants in the CNN class, I decided to employ the use to pair-work.

Okoye, describes the SDPA, or Self-Directed Process Approach as a method of teaching students how to teach themselves writing in very large classes (225). Given that the CNN class often has 32-35 students in attendance, I applied some of the SDPA ideas to this multi-skills class and became more of a facilitator interested in helping students develop self-assessment and self-improvement skills as Okoye suggests (225). Applying the idea of SDPA to error correction, the teacher, therefore ends up correcting only the things or items the students cannot correct themselves. The CNN class teaches students through the use of questions, peer feedback, text analysis, vocabulary, and the discussion of macro- and microlistening. And in a similar fashion to a writing class, in the CNN class, pairwork to compare written answers or notes is easy to manage. If they were to edit an answer (i.e., for CNN 1.3, Political Correctness) they might discuss the answers they have written or are writing, evaluate the transcript, comment on, and even edit each others answers.

4. An attempt to link classroom language with language learning outside the classroom.

The CNN class takes a whole language thematic approach. I provide the thematic unit and CNN video segment that acts as a focal point which immerses students in an integrated listening, reading, writing, speaking activity. We view video segments on business, science, technology, politics, and many other fields that the more advanced students may soon be studying at Cornell. Students should be learning about the world at large through their contact with me.

Nunan further states: "Learners should be given a model of the target language as well as specific practice in manipulating key language problems (282). In Nunan's "Steps Involved in the Development of a Pedagogic Task." Breen (1987) suggests that a task is: any structured language learning endeavor which has a particular objective (i.e., different question types, macro- or microskills), appropriate content (i.e., video segment and transcripts), a specified working procedure (see CNN classroom procedure), and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task with varying degrees of success with the answers (qtd. in Nunan 281).

The rationale for the CNN class lessons are relatively the same for a task-based speaking class (Nunan 282):

1 To give learners the opportunity to develop language skills relevant to their real world needs (i.e., note-taking, summarizing skills, business vocabulary for an MBA program).

2. To provide learners the opportunity to listen to (i.e., the CNN segments) and analyze (i.e., by comparing answer sheets and transcripts) ways in which native speakers used the target language carry out what they are trying to say (i.e.,points of view).

3. To provide learners explicit instruction (i.e., my discussing the vocabulary or answers) and offer guided practice.

Speaking, listening, and pronunciation are indespensible to any coherent curriculum design (Murphy 51). Murphy classes these three: "reciprocally interdependent oral language processes (51). Following Murphy's design, speaking activities refer to activities that provide opportunites for improving oral fluency (pairwork) through interpersonal communication. Pronunciation activities would include hearing, speaking, and gaining control over the sound system (51).

The CNN Answer Sheets

"Current theorist describe listening comprehension as an interactive, interpretive process in which listeners engage in a dynamic construction of meaning (Murphy 56). While attending to spoken language (via the video or pairwork), listeners predict topic development (Crow, 1983; Goss, 1982), use a series of definable microlistening subskills (Richards, 1993), relate what they hear to their personal stores of prior knowledge (Dunkel, 1986) and creatively react to what speakers say (qtd. in Murphy, 56). Several other researchers point out that micro-level listening subskills are just as critical to the overall listening process as

macrolevel listening strategies. Choi (1988) also quoted in Murphy presented convincing evidence from a large study of Korean ESL learners, that practice with microlistening is indispensable for understanding fast, fluent, conversational speech such as is often found in a CNN Newsroom segment.

Applying Murphys approach (51) as part of working on an answer sheet and writing answers for the separate CNN units, he makes two distinctions. The first, more general activities that focus upon the skills of composing (i.e., brainstorming, with students collaborating on answers together in pairwork) and second, those that center upon details and the accuracy of the final product (i.e., controlled composition, revising syntax). In CNN 1.3 on Political Correctness, in question 1, when students are asked to define the term "politically correct" or in question 6 summarize the viewpoint of a particular speaker, they are essentially deciding on the answer within a controlled composition. This is partly my rationale for dividing several of the CNN units into two parts "Check the Main Ideas" (Macro listening) and "Focus on Details" (micro listening). In the instructions for CNN 1.9 students are asked to write answers to questions that might be found in a textbook such as Ann Raimes', "Focus on Composition". They listen and watch (the video), read and skim (the transcripts), and finally write an answer centered on the subskills of purpose, description, cause and effect, and comparison and contrast in some cases. Microskills for conversational listening are divided by Richards into 33 microskills (e.g., minimal pairs, stress patterns of sentences, rhythmic structure) and 18 microskills for listening to academic lectures which I heavily emphasize in both my listening and writing classes (qtd. in Murphy 56). Academic microskills for listening might include for example:

(1) identifying the purpose and scope of the lecture (or video segment)
(2) identifying the role of discourse markers (i.e., CNN 1.9, *in order to*)
(3) recognizing key lexical items (i.e., synonyms, CNN 1.7, *Closer Look*)
(4) deducing meaning of unfamiliar words from context (CNN 1.18, question and 2: the use of the word *giants , superhighway* means. . . followed by a multiple choice answer).
(5) detecting the attitude of the speaker towards the subject matter (CNN 1.4, question 8: What does the Surgeon General feel about the cigarette ads? or CNN 1.6 question 10: Summarize the two points Thomas Lauria, Spokesman, of the Tobacco Institute makes.)

Furthermore, Kirkland and Saunders reinforce my increased use of summary and multiple choice questions in all the classes I teach, and the CNN class in particular very well. They assert: "Summary skills are essential in an academic setting due to the frequency of summary assignments, the potential for using summarizing as a study aid (i.e., lecture notes), and the need for the skill in more complex assignments involving the incorporation of source materials in original discourse (i.e., term paper) (105). They further add that summarizing skills are essential to academic success.

Through my own experience, I feel summaries develop vocabulary, promote critical reading and comprehension,and emphasize writing as a tool for learning. Summary writing integrates reading and writing, prompts students to reprocess text by selecting main ideas, rejecting details, substituting synonyms and paraphrasing content material.

Likewise, I have found in my writing and speaking classes, the act of paraphrasing aids students' comprehension of unfamiliar materials by helping them create meaning by recasting it in their own words and assimilating it with prior knowledge by rephrasing, summarizing, and elaborating.

In evaluating the context and content of a CNN video segment, first by listening, and then by reading the transcript, a student shows comprehension of the video segment,and the comprehension of meaning when they display the ability to apply the comprehended material (video segment and transcripts) to the tasks at hand (a CNN answer sheet) (Kirkland and Saunders 110).

Being My Own Critic

Kirschner, Wexler, and Spector-Cohen offer a theoretical framework and working assumptions that I found useful in the development of questions in my CNN series (539). The framework is underlined.

1. Test questions should constitute a communicative interchange between the test writer and the test taker. Although I provide the students with underlined answers keyed to the transcripts, this part of the class is a lively exchange of ideas between the students and myself. I often find ambiguities in my questions, missing vocabulary, questions that need to be rewritten or omitted, and disagreements on answers.

2. Test questions should be as easy for test takers to process as possible. This is the most challenging part of writing questions in a multi-level, multi-skills class. If the questions are too easy, the students do not feel challenged. If the questions are too difficult, and out of the range of at least a 75% success ratio, they will feel frustrated. Researchand common sense both show that in order for optimum learning to occur students must have a 75% success rate to build upon.

3. It is the test writer's task to define, identify, and subsequently remove any potential difficulties inherent in the test questions. During the reading section of the CNN class procedure is a process (Kirschner, Wexler, Spector-Cohen) describe as one students do with full-length, unedited academic texts (538). As in my own question sheets, "the accompanying questions attempt to assess student ability to process a text (or in my case a transcript) on a micro- and macro-level (538). When I choose a topic or video segment to save or archive, the choice of the text and tasks implicit in the test questions should reflect tasks students are expected to perform in the academic studies at Cornell. By just reading the transcripts for CNN 1.9, Education in Brazil, the word "because" signals the emphasis on a cause and effect style of discourse. This is what Ellis describes as "formulaic, ready-made chunks" that are often rule-based (93). Thus, the questions I write should reflect that implicit language. In other words, my lesson should approximate the real-life task of a

Cornell University student. The focus remains on comprehension of meaning within the text or transcript. As they will find with their own reading, listening and speaking when they continue at Cornell, the only true and correct meanings of words will often be the situations in which they are used. Attention usually centers, however, upon some one aspect of the situation in which a word is used, and this aspect becomes the prominent feature of its meaning in the context.

In pointing out characteristic patterns of teacher-questioning activities my intent has not been to demean or criticize my own patterns. Rather, the concern is that I am aware of such characteristics in order to develop and use questions to develop optimal thinking by students. Field testing will improve my question strategies in the listening classroom. Perhaps many questions may be quite unnecessary for comprehension stimulation. With every class and with every handout I write, problems with ambiguous questions and answers arise. In light of this criticism of my own materials, it is imperative that analysis should be done on a ongoing basis.

Writing my own Class Materials

My listening classes are question-driven. Accordingly, the *question* is the *indicator* of the student's success or failure in both the listening classroom, my CNN Newsroom Class, or the listening section of the TOEFL exam. Put another way, the questions are an *indicators* to me since in most cases, they will never achieve better results in a test or Cornell lecture class than they do in my class. If students perform something 90% well in the relatively structured, sympathetic environment of my listening class, they will surely perform no better than this (and will probably perform worse) on a TOEFL or lecture class.

How well they do on answering questions and how well I write them are very serious matters to me. A knowledge of each student's strengths and limitations in the area of comprehension must be established on a continuing basis. I use an inventory of comments and and careful observations made of my students' oral and written responses to various types of questions.

Some Conclusion and General Viewpoints

The word "planned" takes on great importance. My classes echo my belief that many short exposures are better that a few long exposures to new information. Presentation of content should be in as many modes (repetition) as possible. Different students learn things in varying ways. When exposed to the "same thing" in diverse ways, the language learner has a better chance of getting a permanent "hook" on the content.

All of my classes are definitely guided by some of the underlying principles of *task-based* learning (Nunan 279). A task-based approach allows me to progress from *controlled, semi-controlled,* to the *free* types of activities. It is to my advantage as well as the students. Degree of control refers to the amount of structure that I impose on an activity as well as the number of choices students are expected to make. Generally speaking, a *task-based approach* allows me to maintain objectives which are relevant to the students. Small-step sequential programming perhaps allows for both short and long-range planning. This is a

small-step, not a lock-step approach.

Students need to be exposed to *how* the language works and do not always need extensive explanation of rules and examples as in *learning*.(Ellis 93). In the CNN class, they must write down ideas, read and interpret passages, listen carefully to each other and the videos, and speak as best they can at the time. Students develop the four language skills by *participating* in *functional communicative activities* which allow the skills to emerge and develop naturally as opposed to skills taught on a rigid, teacher-directed calendar. *Task-based* does not mean inflexibility.

I think it is indispensable to determine and reveal the objectives of a lesson, relate and promote the perceived purpose of the lesson, and finally explain the activities and describe the strategies. Students hopefully realize the power of their own choices while studying English and realize that they have success stories of their very own when they put forth time and energy.

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